



## PAS Conference report

The church hall of the quiet little village of St Vigean on the outskirts of Arbroath was home to our annual conference on Saturday 4 October. To the casual eye, there is little in the village to indicate its former importance, but St Vigean is home to an important collection of Pictish carved stones. Chalmers illustrated four in 1848, but the majority were found when major alterations and repairs were carried out on the church in 1871. In the 1960s, the stones were placed in a small museum housed in one of a row of cottages across the road from the church. Although safe from wind and rain, the display left much to be desired; in some cases, carved surfaces were hidden and the lighting was generally poor. As an unmanned museum, with the keys available previously from a holder in the village or, latterly, from Arbroath Abbey, there was concern too for the security of these precious items. However, all this has changed, and, thanks to Historic Scotland, we were about to preview the results of their work on extending the museum, cleaning, conserving and redisplaying the stones.

As part of the St Vigean project, experts from a number of disciplines had come together to study the stones and their context. We had been fortunate to hear an early account of some of the work from Jane Geddes at our Cupar conference; this year we heard from some of her colleagues involved in the project. The following account of the day's proceedings has had to be fairly ruthlessly compressed, and contains only brief notes on the talks.

Shepherded by bell-ringer Nigel Ruckley, everyone had a chance to visit the museum, which will open to the public next Spring. Historic Scotland must take credit for transforming the museum, creating space and effective lighting to display the cleaned and conserved stones in an elegant setting. No-one came back to any of the committee with negative comments: if you missed the chance to be at the conference, try to get to St Vigean next Spring to see this great collection sympathetically displayed.

David Henry, in his opening remarks, paid tribute to the many notable antiquaries whose

local connections and interest in the Pictish period remains of the area have contributed much to our understanding of early historic Angus and St Vigean in particular. Early in the field were Andrew Jervise and Patrick Chalmers. The Reverend William Duke published an account, with photographs, of the finding of many of the stones when the church was refurbished in 1871. Joseph Anderson, Keeper of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland from 1869, Assistant-Secretary and editor to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, who, together with J Romilly Allen, published *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, was the son of a St Vigean farm labourer. The connections with notable figures in the field of archaeology and history continue to modern times: the late Graham Ritchie spent part of his youth in Arbroath, where his father was principal teacher of Classics and Deputy Headmaster at the High School. It seems fitting that so many who have contributed so much over the years to Pictish studies should have had close connections with such an important Pictish centre.

David then introduced Peter Yeoman, Head of Cultural Resources at Historic Scotland, who spoke on **A year in Pictland: redisplaying the St Vigean stones**. Peter described the philosophy that lay behind Historic Scotland's approach to redisplaying collections of carved stones, and the strategy behind the project. Focus is shifting away from simply displaying artefacts to attempting to present a coherent picture of why a particular site is important in history. At the same time, a large number of factors have to be considered: the need for conservation and security of the objects displayed, the balance between local and national interest in deciding whether they should be kept close to the place of their discovery or removed to a larger centre, public access, community involvement and the educational use of the material all have to be considered. At the same time, technical problems such as the non-destructive mounting, lighting, and ease of viewing have all to be factored in. The old museum was too cramped to allow of much improvement in the display of the stones. The opportunity came to purchase the adjoining

## Village people, 4 October 2008



*Janet Penman and the catering team from Café Dun*



*Eileen Brownlee*



*Peter Yeoman*

cottage and to extend the space available, and the decision was taken to go ahead with the project. The stones were removed to Historic Scotland's conservation labs in Edinburgh, and they were carefully cleaned and prepared for redisplay. The opportunity was taken to involve a number of experts from a range of disciplines: art historians, geologists, place-name experts, illustrators and historians in studies aimed at investigating afresh the background to the collection of stones.

The resulting discoveries and new interpretations were used to inform the new displays. For example, the work of the geologists revealed a group comprising the Drosten stone, the shrine-shaped monument and a recumbent which were carved probably in the early 9th century from stone from the same source. Associated artefactual material has been included in displays close to the relevant groups of stones, while photographic imagery of Angus scenery has been used to provide a background. All carved surfaces are visible, and the lighting has been greatly improved.

Peter was followed by Isabel Henderson whose theme was **Characterising the major centres**



*Norman Atkinson*



*Katherine Forsyth*



*Isabel Henderson*



*Nigel Ruckley*



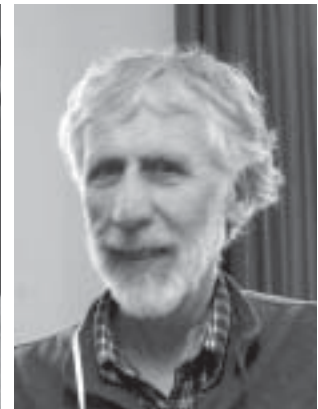
*John Borland*



*Derek Alexander*



*Simon Taylor*



*David Henry*

*All from photographs taken by Joy Mowatt*

**of Pictish carved stone monuments, with special reference to St Vigean.**

Isabel took as her starting point Anna Ritchie's paper on Meikle and lay patronage in Tayside in the 9th and 10th centuries AD (*Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal* I, 1995 pp.1–10), in which the probable intended uses for the carved stones found at a series of sites led to the conclusion that there was evidence for the presence of elaborate stone buildings probably churches at sites such as Meikle, Govan and St Vigean, with evidence also for lay patronage at these sites.

Martin Carver's work at Portmahomack associates the stones found there with evidence for a monastic community, flourishing and carving elaborate stones in the late 8th to early 9th centuries. At Meikle, the enclosure was large enough to include some form of monastic settlement, but the church mound at St Vigean seemed too small to accommodate such an establishment. However, as Jane Geddes has pointed out, the nearby hillock could have provided the setting here for the residential buildings of a monastery. The monasteries were unlike the later, large establishments where large numbers of individuals led lives structured by a Rule according to the order to which they belonged, isolated from the secular world outside of the monastic precinct. The evidence currently available suggests that Pictish monasteries were much smaller communities observing a religious life, but not necessarily one that excluded the laity. Attempts to distinguish between the religious and the secular may not be meaningful in such contexts.

The diversity of form present in assemblages such as that at St Vigean allows the possibility of studying the significance of the way in which sculpture was used, and can help in determining a context for production. St Vigean is only one of a number presently available for study: the group includes those found at Portmahomack, Kinneddar, Burghead, St Andrews and in the Forteviot area (Isabel made a strong plea for the renaming of the Dupplin Cross as 'Constantine's Cross').

At St Vigean, it is possible that there was once a strong association with a saint or possibly a cult with royal associations. Jane Geddes has suggested that the 'hogback' stone here may in fact be of the same type as the St Leonard's shrine at St Andrews. There is a difficulty with

language here: a shrine is usually regarded as containing relics, whereas this obviously could not be the case in a solid monument. Perhaps these were markers laid over a grave, in effect 'shrine tombs', retaining the implications of a cult drawing pilgrims to the church. At St Vigean we have a wide range of elements to ponder: cross slabs, grave markers, a possible shrine, free-standing crosses and possible architectural fragments. The church here obviously had powerful patrons. The stones suggest a site of some grandeur, where the services of skilled craftsmen were displayed.

John Borland, of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, then talked us through **Reconstructing the fragmentary remains at St Vigean: The benefits of a multi-disciplinary approach.**

John summarised the history of recording and publishing the stones at St Vigean, before describing the most recent work. RCAHMS has aimed at completeness and consistency in the illustration of the stones, and the importance of this became clear. By ensuring that all stones and fragments are drawn to a consistent scale, it becomes easier to identify the form of a monument from a fragment, and to recognise fragments as coming from the same stone. Allen's St Vigean Nos 12 and 24 can be seen to be a part of the same stone.

Nos 4 and 21 are probably fragments of a single stone. The hooded figure and horse on separate fragments of the reverse match well, but the relationship of the borders of the cross is rather poor. However, the geology of the fragments agrees, making it more likely that they are from the same monument.

No.16 does not fit comfortably with Allen's description of it as a fragment of a cross slab. The form and size are, as Jane Geddes suggested, more like those of the upper end of a free-standing cross (or even of the end of an arm of such a cross). This would be the first free-standing cross to be recognised as carrying symbols, and would require revisiting the classification proposed in the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*. For good measure, No.5 also looks suspiciously like a symbol-bearing fragment of a free-standing cross, although this time from nearer the base.

Historic Scotland's masons freed enough of the surfaces of a recumbent stone built into the wall of the present church to reveal a reused socket,



remnants of interlace and triangular key patterns, underlining the possibility that many more fragments may remain in the area.

The work on the St Vigean stones draws attention to the problems of relying on classifications and nomenclatures developed over a hundred years ago, when far fewer stones were known and the first attempts at a systematic study of Pictish art were published.

Thomas Clancy, of the University of Glasgow, was unable to be with us as planned. His colleague, Katherine Forsyth gave us a brief resume of Thomas's latest thoughts on the inscription on the Drosten stone. As it is possible that we may hear from him at a later date in the Spring programme, we have omitted a summary of Katherine's talk, but would like to thank her for stepping in at such brief notice.

Simon Taylor moved the focus from the stones to their context, examining Celtic place names in and around St Vigean. The area is rich in archaeological sites of the early historic period, but many of their names are first recorded fairly late. In fact, apart from an earlier mention of Angus, the earliest records of place names in the area date to the twelfth century.

St Vigean was noted in 1198 as *ecclesia Sancti Vigiani de Aberbrothoc*. At this period, 'Aberbrothoc' seems to have been the name of a villa. The saint is probably Fechin, an Irish saint of the seventh century, popular from Connemara to Louth. His name may also be incorporated in Torphichen and Ecclefechan. The form 'Vigean' suggests mutation through Pictish. Simon noted the similarity in form between the early description, 'the church of St Vigean at Arberbrothoc' to the early 'church of St Andrew at Kilrymont', which gave rise to the later Saint Andrews. In both cases, the saint's name has displaced an earlier place name. In St Vigean's case, the original name, Aberbrothoc, became associated with the settlement seaward of the early site, and with the later abbey.

('Aber-' names are not infrequently dissociated from the corresponding river mouth, cf. Abirlot and Abernethy.) Simon suggested that this may indicate a relationship with saintly relics, rather than sites founded by the saint.

He then went on to consider place-names in neighbouring parishes, some of which may at one time have been held by the church at St Vigean. Many were in the possession of the

later abbey of Arbroath. Skryne, for example, is an early name attached to lands which provided income to a shrine, and a rare example of the name in Scotland. This may have been a shrine at St Vigean, rather than associated with the (probably) later Panbride, in which parish it lies. Many of the local names give some indication of the nature of the countryside, and of the possession of lands at an early date.

Simon's talk, covering a large canvas, is difficult to summarise in the short space available. As with the others, it is hoped that enough of a flavour is given to indicate what may be published when the final stage of the St Vigean project, the publication of the studies carried out as part of the attempt to relate the stones to their place and time, reaches fruition.

Derek Alexander followed with an account of **Death and burial in the Pictish Heartland**, setting the period within the limits AD300–900. A number of Pictish symbol stones have been found in association with graves of this period, at Inchyra, Dunrobin, Ackergill and elsewhere. Distinctive square cairns covering inhumation burials of the period have been found at Lundin Links (c. AD450–650) and Red Castle (c. 3rd–9th century), while a symbol stone was recovered from Cairn 1 of the cairn cemetery at Garbeg.

Square cairns are known in the Western Isles. One at Cille Pheadair, South Uist, covered the remains of a woman in her forties who had fed largely on a terrestrial diet, despite being laid to rest so near a source of fish and seafood.

On the Isle of May, a huge cairn covered many burials, dating from the 5th century onward. At that site, as at other sites where appreciable numbers of skeletons have been uncovered, there is a fairly even split between male and female. At sites where the number of identifiable remains is small, there seems to be a tendency for female skeletons to predominate. The numbers are small, but it is possible that this reflects a real pattern. Infants are rarely found, although at Knowe of Skea, both children and infants were found.

A lack of grave goods and the poor preservation of organic remains at most sites in Pictish territory restricts the amount of information available from Pictish burials, but increasing use of analytical techniques may afford more insight into diet and mobility among the Picts. Dating techniques are proving useful in studying

different forms of burial. It is possible to go further: Christine Donald of the University of Dundee has succeeded in reconstructing the face of one of the women buried at Lundin Links. The 3-D image will be on show in the refurbished McManus gallery in Dundee from next year. [See p.11: *Pictavia* lecture, 20 February 2009]

Our final speaker, Norman Atkinson, gave a very condensed version of his paper **Sair back and sair banes, carryin' the church o' St Vigean's stanes: some aspects of the early church**. As we may have the opportunity to hear this in full at a future date, a report on this paper has been omitted here.

We had opportunities throughout the day to choose books, courtesy of TAFAC, The Society for Medieval Archaeology and Pinkfoot Press. We also had a chance to examine the fragment found at Castle of Fiddes in the late 1960s and displayed for the first time.

Finally, any report on the day would be incomplete if it did not mention the splendid lunch provided by Café Dun.

Our thanks to all who made the day such a memorable one: to the parishioners of St Vigean's for the use of their hall, to Janet and her team from Café Dun, to the speakers who regaled us with so much in the way of new information and new ideas, and finally to Historic Scotland whose staff had the vision, commitment and drive to carry through the St Vigean's project to a triumphant end. *Sheila Hainey*

Our special thanks to Sheila for providing this invaluable report on the day's proceedings.

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## Next stop Meigle Museum

### Historic Scotland's plans for study and display of the collection

In a letter to PAS President, the Chief Executive of Historic Scotland, John S Graham, states that:

Starting next financial year, we are planning to begin a similar research programme [*à la* St Vigean's] at Meigle that, resources permitting, will we hope lead onto a redisplay of that wonderful stone collection.

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## Meigle outing

Sunday 5 October saw about twenty members of the Society visit the museum at Meigle. After having had a short time at the new museum at St Vigean's the day before, many were expecting

to find ourselves wishing to see Meigle high on Historic Scotland's list of sites to get a make-over. However, the day was ideal, with a bright sun angling low through the large windows of the old school, shedding an oblique light on the stones that revealed details with startling clarity. The conditions for viewing the stones were ideal. Meigle was far ahead of its time in its display, with all carved surfaces clearly visible and easy to photograph. The debate over coffee turned to listing which collection of stones should be regarded as most urgently needing the kind of sympathetic presentation we had seen at St Vigean's. Let us know what would be your favourite. *SH*

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## Eileen Eaton

the well known steward at Meigle Museum retired at the end of October. Her ever-friendly and warm welcome to visitors to Meigle will be sorely missed, as will her knowledge of the collection which she eagerly shared with visitors.

A letter of appreciation of her work over the years was sent to her on behalf of PAS by our President:

Dear Eileen,

On behalf of the Pictish Arts Society, I would like to thank you for all that you have done to foster an interest in Pictish art during your time at Meigle Museum. Your knowledge and enthusiasm have been greatly appreciated by very many visitors over the years. Those who have made the study of the stones their life's work, those whose interest has been sparked by a chance visit to Meigle and all shades of enthusiasm in between are grateful for the warm welcome we received from you. We shall miss you when we visit the museum, but I know all our members will join with me in wishing you all the very best in your retirement,  
Yours etc, Norman Atkinson



*Earnest discussions at Meigle: (l-r) Stewart Mowatt, David MacKenzie, Ross Trench-Jellicoe, Niall Robertson, Mark Hall*

© Joy Mowatt

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## St Vigean's museum: some first impressions from PAS members

“Light, bright and interesting. I thought the visibility of the stones was good, too.”

“Great improvement. Much more space. Very good use of natural and artificial light. I like the sound pods. Great to be able see the stones properly. Observed people on the Friday after conference and there was a positive buzz about the place. Interpretive materials seem to appeal to all ages. Historic Scotland should be promoting St Vigean's to all sorts of community groups who are always looking for ideas for their programme of visits for their syllabus. I have already recommended it to a number of local organisation I know of.”

“The new displays make good use of space and light, and my first impression was welcoming. The display plinths and interpretation panels are sympathetic and thoughtfully placed and ensure that all sculptured faces are clearly visible. The stones themselves have been carefully conserved and look fresh and crisp with the removal of some older ‘repairs’.

The display of this superb collection of early medieval carvings is a credit to Historic Scotland, and will hopefully attract many new and returning visitors to this special place.”

“I was struck by the freshness of the stones and the variations in their colour – an extra dimension achieved by the extensive programme of cleaning and conserving the collection.”

“The architect and designers have performed a miracle by fitting everything in yet appearing still to have space within the very limited confines of the building.”

“The increased size of the new museum is immediately apparent and allows for a reception desk as well as toilets. The majority of the extra space,

however, is used for exhibits and this space is put to very good use. The whole area is airy and well-lit, both from natural and artificial sources. The stones are well displayed, with good interpretive material and pleasant backgrounds.

As small museums go, St Vigean's is a class leader and a splendid new resource for Angus that will please touring visitors and serious students alike. Historic Scotland is to be congratulated on a job very well done.”

“Great to see the stones in their true colours, logically grouped and set out so that all the carving is visible. The lighting is excellent and the use of space is admirable.”

“I was relieved to see that the stones were not behind sheets of unsightly glass and that the visitor was still able to feel close to them instead of the ‘them and us’ feeling one gets in many museums where glass partitions the public from the objects of their affection.

I am not sure about the pale seats by the door, but there is just enough space for parties of 15 to move about and not get in each other's way.

To summarise: it looks good, lovely lighting on a dull day and the stones are not under glass with huge reflective spotlights glaring down on them.”

“Good work on providing decent light on the stones. Unlike in the old museum, it should be possible to get decent photographs to work with. The displays make much more sense, too.”

Open to the public from 1 April 2009. A new guidebook to the collection should be available then and it is hoped that the volume containing the academic research papers will be published shortly afterwards.



*Interior of the museum facing the rear wall*

© Nigel Ruckley



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## PAS miscellany

**Conference catering** – Members attending the conference enjoyed the catering provided by Janet Penman and her team from Café Dun at House of Dun, a National Trust for Scotland property between Brechin and Montrose. Janet and her team were on hand to ensure everyone had plenty hot food to eat followed by fresh fruit and home-baked cookies.

**Field trip** – The theme for Sunday’s field trip was a visit to the museum in Meikle, which quite a few members joined. Following on from the St Vigeans conference and the visit to the newly refurbished and extended museum, Meikle helped put into context many of the comments from the previous day’s speakers. Newer members took the opportunity to learn from the more experienced members who readily answered their questions. As the weather changed, the light and shade cast over the stones highlighted the carvings and members spent a fair amount of time appreciating the detail.

Conversations continued as members enjoyed a light lunch in the Joinery coffee shop close by before heading home. The Joinery had recently changed hands and the new owners made us very welcome. On a subsequent visit, committee members Stewart and Joy Mowatt were delighted when they agreed to put our PAS recruitment leaflets on display for customers.

**Membership renewals** – Membership Secretary Joy Mowatt has been encouraged by the prompt response of members to the renewal forms sent out in October. She urges those who receive this newsletter, and who have not yet renewed, to do so as soon as possible.

**Future developments** – The meeting with Angus Council Joy mentioned in her recent letter to you was very positive and Joy will be working with Ann Butler to develop the programme of events. If any of you is interested in being included, please contact Joy as soon as possible to discuss it. We are not expecting members to do this as unpaid volunteers and reasonable expenses will be included in the business plan.

**Car sharing** – A member contacted Joy before the first lecture of the season to find out if there was likely to be anyone travelling from her area. This is the member’s comment:

*I wonder if there might be interest in organising a small group to share transport to meetings. In*

*particular I would like to combine in travelling from the Perth area to Pictavia. I would not wish to drive but would be happy to pay my share of costs.*

If anyone wishes to respond, please do so to Joy at <members@pictart.org>, and your details will be passed on.

Since this may be worth considering for other events, anyone willing to car share is invited to contact Joy as above so she can put members in touch with each other. Your details will not be passed on to others unless you grant permission to do so.

**E-newsletters** – A suggestion was made at the AGM that the committee consider e-mailing the newsletter to members. If you have any thoughts on this, please send them in so that we can gauge whether it is worth exploring further. Also, if you are interested in being informed of any event we learn about which would be too late for a newsletter, please advise us so that an e-mail group can be set up. This would only be used to pass on information on Pict-related matters we believe would be of interest to you.

*Joy Mowatt*

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## Latest Mail delivery

A gravedigger is set to receive a cash reward after stumbling across a Pictish carved stone.

Malcolm Smith discovered the ornate item while preparing a grave at the ancient Mail cemetery in Cunningsburgh, Shetland.

The slab measures about 45 by 25cm and is thought to be a fragment of a larger stone. Amazingly, it’s the second such artefact Malcolm has found in recent years. He discovered another Pictish stone, which featured an unusual carving of a figure with a dog’s head, at the burial ground in 1992. The cemetery has been used for religious purposes for 2000 years



*The Mail fragment*

© Shetland Museums and Archives

and may have been a centre of cultural or political power during Pictish times. The stone is of particular interest as it has both Christian and pre-Christian symbols.

Dr Ian Tait, curator of collections at Shetland Museum, was 'flabbergasted' when Malcolm brought it in. Shetland Museum acquired the first artefact, known as the Mail stone, from Treasure Trove Scotland, which is responsible for claiming objects on behalf of the Crown. In return, the museum had to pay the lucky gravedigger an undisclosed sum as a reward.

Malcolm will find out how much he is to be paid for the new discovery following a meeting of the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel on October 6. The panel will also decide which museum will house the stone, described as the most important archaeological discovery on the island for 10 years.

The first stone he found was the most significant discovery here for more than 50 years. No-one could have guessed he would find something like that again in his lifetime.

Dr Tait said the museum was keen to keep the find as it would help encourage tourism on the island.

The museum has been around for 40 years and during that time we've managed to hold on to any artefacts discovered here. We're keen to maintain that record.

Jenny Shiels, Treasure Trove administrator, said any museum interested in acquiring the object had been asked to make their case in writing.

The Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel will then make a recommendation to the Crown Office about where they feel the artefact should go. They'll also decide any reward for the finder, which will be paid by the museum chosen to house the stone.

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## Wind, rain and Snow

The Aberlemno stones are meant to be boxed every year on the last working day of September, however, this year they were still exposed well into October. Apparently the reason for this was to allow access for a film crew.

BAFTA winning historical journalist Dan Snow\* and a production crew were scheduled to visit Aberlemno on the last weekend of October as part of the making of a two-part documentary series which will be broadcast on BBC4 next year.

The major thrust of the series, consisting of two hour-long documentaries presented by Snow, is the influence of early Irish Christianity on Scotland and Britain during the dark ages, and the Picts will feature in the second programme of the series.

There is no information regarding a broadcast date yet, and a title has not been confirmed. However, it has been stated that the series will be completed no earlier than March 2009, and will be screened later in the year.

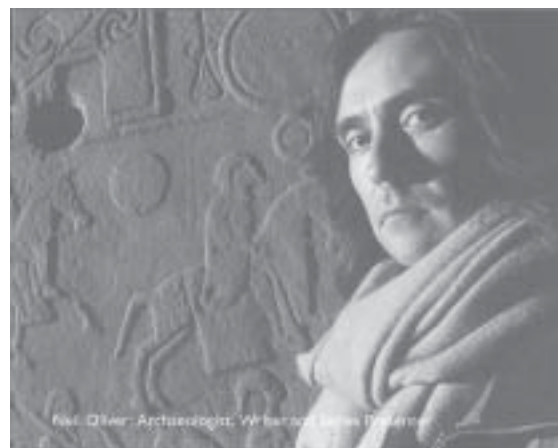
Whether or not Aberlemno will feature in the film is uncertain as the exceptionally foul weather that weekend forced the crew to abandon their schedule and make for Iona instead.

\* Snow won his BAFTA award for an eight-part series on BBC2 in 2004 called *Battlefield Britain*. He has also hosted such programmes as *Britain's Lost World*; *20th Century Battlefields*; *Beating Retreat* and *50 Things You Need To Know About British History*.

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## Aberlemno 2 much?

The Aberlemno kirkyard stone did make an obligatory appearance during the screening on 9 November of *The Last of the Free*, the first programme of the new BBC television series, *A history of Scotland*.



The presenter, Neil Oliver, he of the windswept raven locks and narcissistic attraction to the camera, informed us that the Aberlemno battle-scene represents the action of what is commonly called the Battle of Dunnichen. This 'fact' was given without qualification or explanation that it is merely the opinion of a few scholars, and one which is in danger of becoming universally and uncritically accepted through its constant repetition in print and in programmes such as this.



It is also difficult to reconcile this notion with another of the programme's 'facts': that the battle, supposedly represented at Aberlemno, took place at 'Dun Nechtain [Dunachton] along the River Spey' and this 'fact' was given greater credibility by the use of graphics, showing a moving arrow, superimposed on a satellite-view relief map of Scotland, tracing the Anglian advance up through the central Highlands. As a hypothesis it has some merit, but, surely, this programme should not be used to promote as 'fact' a contentious theory, whose promulgator, Alex Woolf, is listed in the end credits as 'Historic Advisor' to the programme.

The BBC's brochure on *Scotland's History* explains that the multimedia project

will be like no other previous historical series about Scotland: instead the big questions from Scotland's turbulent past are boldly addressed, whilst perceived notions are challenged, providing a fresh perspective with which to explain much about our country as we know it today.

A powerful statement of intent, indeed, – however, if 'boldly addressing' the 'big questions' requires all the big question marks to be thrown away in the process – then it appears somewhat pathetic. While a big question mark remains over the location of the Battle of Dun Nechtain/Dunnichen/Dunachton/Lin Garan/Nechtan-esmere, it is wrong for the programme makers to dupe the tele-viewing public into believing that they have the answer.

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### Island in the sun

Archaeologists from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, working on St Kilda in September, found a previously undiscovered artefact by chance because of the way it was hit by the sun. The stone slab inscribed with a cross, thought to have come from the local churchyard had been reused to cover a drain. Archaeologists said the stone was located in a well-investigated area of the island but had previously gone unnoticed. It was only when the sun shone on it that the cross could be seen. Experts said the discovery showed the importance of returning to the same site at different times of the day. Two other cross-incised slabs have already been recorded in the area. One of the slabs was built into a house and the other into the roof of one of the cleits, the drystone storage sheds that are unique to the



© Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

*The new St Kilda find*

archipelago. It is thought that all three stones came from the nearby chapel or graveyard.

St Kilda, located west of the Outer Hebrides, is a World Heritage Site owned by the National Trust for Scotland. Trust archaeologist Jill Harden said:

We are still a little surprised that this has been found here as the settlement area of Village Bay on Hirta is one of the most investigated historic landscapes cared for by the trust. Nevertheless it is a brilliant discovery and one which will add to our understanding of this amazing location and the unique community it once supported.

Strat Halliday, the archaeologist from RCAHMS who discovered the cross, added:

I was literally just watching where I was putting my feet, and there it was, clear as daylight. And to think I'd walked across the very same spot less than 24 hours previously. It all goes to show how important it is to visit sites more than once and at different times of the day. You never know what's going to pop up next.

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### 'King of Picts' goes to Hollywood

Universal have employed Peter Berg to develop a project about warrior Bran Mak Morn, a fictional king of the Picts, the creation of Robert E Howard, who wrote the 'Conan the Barbarian' books, and also created the character 'Turlough Dubh O'Brien', an 11th century Gaelic pirate. Berg directed the superhero adventure *Hancock*, starring Will Smith, and *The Kingdom* starring Jamie Foxx.

Showbiz magazines have reported on the project about Bran Mak Morn who leads his forces against the Roman army in ancient Britain. The Internet Movie Database expect the film to be on general release in 2010.

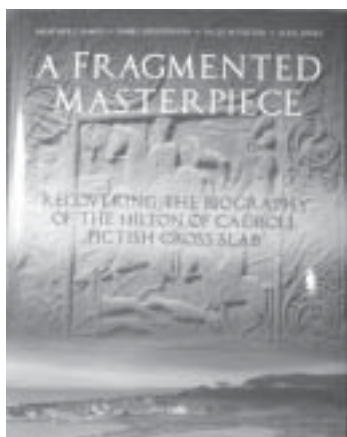
John Romano, the scriptwriter of *Intolerable Cruelty* starring George Clooney and Catherine Zeta Jones, is enthusiastic about writing about the Picts.

Richmond Clements, an organiser of the Highlands comic book convention Hi-Ex, said the film could bring the story of the Picts to the attention of an international audience. He said:

The Picts are such a mysterious and romantic nation it's surprising that they haven't been mined for literature more than they already have. The very fact that so little is known is enormously appealing to a writer, because they're free to fill in the blanks from their own imagination[\*] ... Howard was very good at lifting bits and pieces from what little is known of the Picts then expanding it and making it his own. The only other comparable writer I can think of who can perform this feat and not come off looking like a lazy writer is Pat Mills, whose Celtic warrior Slaine MacRoith appears in 2000AD comic.

[\* Just like some historians then!]

## Hilton of Cadboll publication



### **A Fragmented Masterpiece: Recovering the biography of the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish cross-slab**

*Heather James, Isabel Henderson,  
Sally Foster, and Sian Jones*

The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,  
Edinburgh, 2008  
ISBN 978 0 903903 42 4 hbk £40.00

This eagerly-awaited monograph was launched, on Tuesday 9 December, following the meeting of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, at the Royal Society of Edinburgh's premises in George Street.

We hope to include more about it in a future issue of PAS Newsletter.

## Book review



### **The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland**

*Edited by Iain Fraser*

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical  
Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2008  
ISBN 978 1 902419 53 4

225 x 290mm; viii, 152pp; b/w illuss, map; hbk £20.00

In 1985, RCAHMS published *Pictish Symbol Stones: a handlist*, a modest document, comprising 22 pages of photocopied typescript, augmented by a few line illustrations and a map, stapled within a card cover. This evolved through two improved editions and several printings, to metamorphose now into the handsome volume that is *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland*. In landscape format, it is casebound with printed end papers and laminated dust wrapper, and comprises eight pages of prelims followed by 152 pages of text with countless line and halftone monochrome illustrations and a distribution map. An extremely valuable addition is an appendix (pp.138–40) listing and illustrating portable artefacts bearing Pictish symbols, and an expanded bibliography (pp.141–9) has been usefully updated.

The introduction (pp.1–10) is a revised and very much extended version of the one published in 1999 (*Pictish Symbol Stones: An illustrated gazetteer*) and it still contains material from that of the 1985 original, written by Graham Ritchie with contributions from Isabel Henderson. While their ground-breaking early work for the original handlist remains valid, its repetition in successive editions has become something of a Pictish mantra, and perhaps, if a further edition is ever contemplated, it would be refreshing to see a new approach. As it is, the editor has made significant and useful additions to the introduction, proving himself to be an authoritative commentator on several aspects of the study of the symbol stones – recording, meaning,

locations, biography and bibliography – and, having worked on previous editions, he also provides a reassuring backbone of continuity to the volume and to this area of the work of RCAHMS.

The main body of the publication is an illustrated gazetteer of all known stones (pp.13–137) arranged according to modern administrative Council areas, with Highland Council subdivided into its respective Council areas. Each entry is numbered by site with its name and that of the stone followed by OS and National Grid reference numbers. A short description of each stone is given with its major bibliographic references. The site numbers conveniently also refer to the site location on the distribution map and to the illustrations – a model of clarity and ease of use, and a huge contrast to a previous RCAHMS publication on carved stones, which exhibits such a confusing morass of numbering systems, that it makes it almost impossible to find anything in the book. Here the layout is clean and uncluttered, however, with text on verso and illustrations predominantly on recto, a few sparsely illustrated spreads display an almost disconcerting amount of white space (something that a Pictish carver would not condone!) This is perhaps accentuated by the book designer's choice of landscape format, which is not universally favoured as it tends to present handling and shelf-storage problems as well.

Throughout the publication, it is the illustrations that take pride of place. Several illustrators are given due acknowledgement, but, in a welcome innovation, albeit on the backflap of the dust-wraper, the principal contributors are themselves illustrated at work – the draughtsmen, John Borland, at Fordoun, and Ian G Scott, at Nigg, and the photographer, Steve Wallace at Logierait – all inside the relative 'comfort' of churches, but we should remember that much of their work is done outdoors.

The great asset of this book is that almost all of the illustrative material is reproduced to a uniform scale – 1:15 – making for easy comparison. However, as not all the items are drawn, one is not always able to compare like with like, and the reproduction size is just too mean for many of the smaller items which really need to be accompanied by enlarged details.

The reproduction of many of the photographs is rather dark, and better balanced, crisper

reproduction of halftones is achieved in the 1999 volume, referred to above. Unfortunately here, illus. no 58 (right, p.53), a photograph of the back of the Eassie cross-slab, has been inadvertently reversed left to right. This stone is notoriously difficult to photograph due to the shelter erected round it, so it is interesting to see that RCAHMS followed an established tradition (see caption, p.2) by persuading Historic Scotland to (temporarily) remove the structure to give their photographer an unencumbered view of the whole stone, and it is extremely valuable to have the resulting pictures, which, along with the other book illustrations, are available for study elsewhere.

The stated aim of the book is to provide

an introduction to sources of information about the Picts and their symbolic sculpture, in particular to the resources of the collections of RCAHMS and to the range of illustrative material that is available there [also online through Canmore] (p.8).

This book is indeed a convenient subject catalogue or guide to the collections and resources of RCAHMS, but it is also much more than it modestly sets out to be: it is not only an essential introduction to the subject, but a formidable reference tool for the serious researcher.

You should have no problem deciding what to exchange your Christmas book tokens for this year – no PAS member can afford to be without a copy. DH

### **Pictish Arts Society Pictavia lecture programme**

**16 January**

*Norman Atkinson*

The Pictish Symbol Stones of Angus

**20 February**

*Christina Donald*

Pictoria, the lady from Lundin Links

**20 March**

*David Murray*

Excavations at St Orlands Stone

Doors open at 7.00 pm and all lectures start at 7.30. Tea and coffee available before and after the talk.



## Pictish-Cross-Word

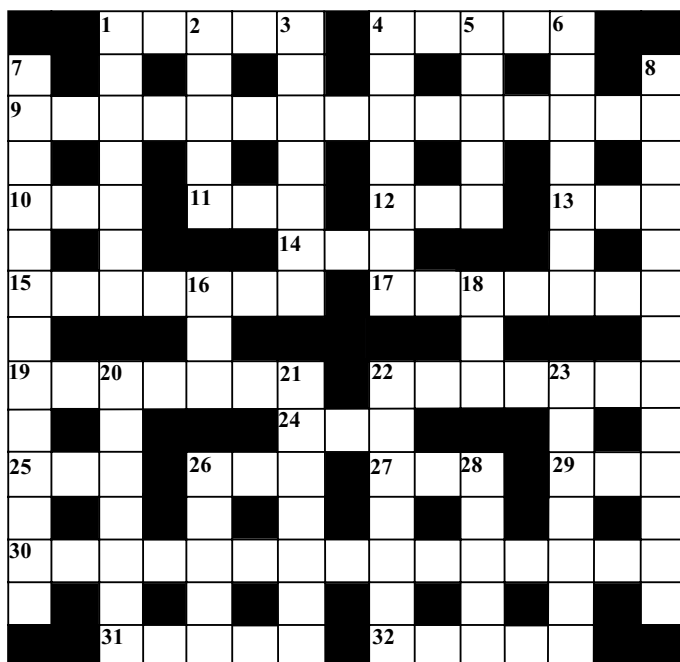
Compiled by Ron Dutton

### ACROSS

- 1 Fight to decommission a small piece (5)
- 4 Devotional images, appropriated by Bill Gates to display in his windows (5)
- 9 Place where Pictish symbols are most likely to be found (2,1,7,5)
- 10 Truncated tree produces messy sap which is poisonous (3)
- 11 Columba probably noticed a lot of it around Iona (3)
- 12 With a sharp bite and a large abdomen, it sounds like my mother's sister (3)
- 13 She was the first the night before (3)
- 14 At least 1,150 Romans would know this (3)
- 15 It was heavy for certain, but its form was determined by medieval monk's allegiance (7)
- 17 Classically derived female name (7)
- 19 Tat gear spoiled a fun day out for the Pictish navy (7)
- 22 Early ecclesiastical one at Nicaea, modern secular version very taxing (7)
- 24 Reformed traditional verse form is female animal, possibly a symbol? (3)
- 25 Essential item for becalmed nautical monk, but not St Columba, apparently (3)
- 26 It's far from good (3)
- 27 Post-op transsexual monk, perhaps? (3)
- 29 Reverse wolf twice, or edit once for a clue (3)
- 30 A sadder RC convent ought to produce a symbol (8,3,1-3)
- 31 Spanish saint brings secular delights to children at Christian festival (5)
- 32 Nechtan MacDerile was one, but not St Adomnan. Perhaps he didn't measure up (5)

### DOWN

- 1 Use the rash pen of the scribe to improve the swordsman's weapon (7)
- 2 Sounds like what the weather does is essential for Pictish horsemen (5)
- 3 A favourite toponymic tool for Pictish scholars (3,4)



Solution will appear in PAS Newsletter 50

- 4 Put in place, a horse perhaps? (7)
- 5 Commencement of alterations to stone (5)
- 6 The most tardy, not high in the middle, either (7)
- 7 French owned flower leads Irish monastery to end in the Christian era (13)
- 8 Frequently quoted esteemed ecclesiastical source (9,4)
- 16 The corresponding Latin abbreviation for last month (3)
- 18 St Anthony's cross about that letter from Greece (3)
- 20 Useful features of medieval monasteries, still of growing popularity today (7)
- 21 Find the sum, then finish an article to discover the publisher's afterthoughts (7)
- 22 Armed quadruped, more than a hundred, on cross slabs (7)
- 23 Comparative state of clarity, following elucidation (7)
- 26 In AD685, a rasher Bruide might not have saved it for the Picts (5)
- 28 Relating to an old rearranged point from which leaves emanate (5)

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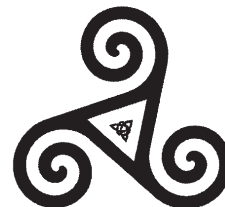
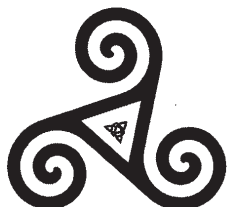
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The deadline for receipt of contributions to PAS Newsletter 50 is 14 February 2009.

email to <[pas.news@btconnect.com](mailto:pas.news@btconnect.com)> or post to The Editor, PAS News at the Pictavia address:

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